DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 059 CS 507 659

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TITLE The Communication Paradigm in the Debate Process.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; *Communication Skills; *Debate; Higher Education; *Judges; *Persuasive Discourse; *Public Speaking; Student Evaluation; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS Debate Coaches; *Debate Strategies; Debate Tournaments; *Speech Rate

ABSTRACT

Over the last several years the increased speed of delivery in debate tournaments has made it difficult for judges to keep up with a debate during a round of competition. The responsibility for communication should be upon each debater to deliver his or her arguments, with intelligence, to the judge or critic. Debate is an oral communication process, so fast delivery not only defeats the purpose of persuasive communication, but also works against one of the expressed goals of the CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association)--to improve students' communication skills. Although speed is clearly used so that debaters can present more arguments than the opposing team, this practice does nothing for developing useful communication skills that focus on analysis and persuasion of an audience. It is interesting that although most judges do not favor speed in delivery, they are reluctant to reflect this in their ballots, and fast debaters are therefore continuing to win rounds. Since other debaters model the winning techniques, judges should stop rewarding those who favor a fast delivery. Four ways to improve delivery are: (1) to clarify the goals of CEDA; (2) to allow judges to penalize speed; (3) to adopt an audience-centered model for debate; and (4) to emphasize public speaking skills that are usable after the competition is over. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (PRA)

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THE COMMUNICATION PARADIGM IN THE DEBATE PROCESS

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Presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention
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November 1991
Atlanta, Georgia

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THE COMMUNICATION PARADIGM IN THE DEBATE PROCESS

Introduction

After reading the title of this paper the reader would most likely come to the conclusion that the author is about to criticize current debate practices concerning speed in delivery and advocate a stronger "communication" perspective. That basic conclusion would not be far off the actual intent of this paper. This paper will review the issues associated with communication, specifically delivery, and make recommendations intended to illicit comment about improving communication in the debate process.

Over the last several years of coaching and judging debate, this author has become more concerned with the ability, or lack of ability, to "keep up" with a debate during a round of competition. The primary culprit for this concern has been increased speed of delivery by debaters. Much introspection leads to the conclusion that this author is simply unable, even unwilling, to accept the perspective that the judge is responsible for digesting everything spewed out by four competitors during an hour debate delivered at a rate beyond the ability of the normal human to understand. Rather, the responsibility for communication in the debate should be upon each debater to deliver his/her arguments, with intelligence, to the judge/critic.

The purpose of this paper is not to argue for, or against, the various judging philosophies and criteria. Rather, the primary focus will remain on the value of communication, specifically delivery, in the debate process. The following issues will be discussed: communication, benefits, speed, judges, audience-centered model, and recommendations.

Communication

It could be argued that communication is the foundation from which all the other debate issues stem. Communication allows the debater to orally present his/her arguments, analysis, evidence, and structure to an audience in an understandable manner for consideration. Without the communication foundation debate, as we know it, could not exist.

Certainly few would argue that debate is not an oral communication exercise. The debate tournament allows the debater(s) an opportunity to demonstrate a variety of skills before other competitors and a judge/critic. During each debate round some type of communication occurs, whether good or bad. At the very least, information has been given in the round and a decision has been rendered for one team and against another team. Thus, some form of basic communication has occurred in the debate process with a decision being made by a judge.

In discussing communication as a focus in debate, of note is the argument, by Sweet (1983), that a communication paradigm will not work in judging debate due to the time constraints placed upon the persuasive process involved in communication (21).

However, the position taken by Sweet (1983) does not address the issue concerning speed of delivery. Simply, the greater the speed the less likely persuasion can even begin to take place in the mind of the receiver.

If the receiver, the judge in the debate, cannot understand the message presented than he/she can hardly make an accurate decision. Additionally, the opposing team is unable to adequately analyze the issues leading to a very muddled debate. The strategy of fast delivery ultimately leads to a lack of communication, which is not the intent of the debate process. Thus, "fast delivery defeats the purpose of persuasive communication" (Brey, 1989, 76). Additionally, poor delivery impacts the development of arguments and their analysis (McBath and Cripe, 1965). Unfortunately, the debate judge has to give one win and one loss in each round judged, whether they understand the debate or not.

On a realistic level, communication involves a number of components that are difficult to separate (Berlo, 1960; Devito, 1978). At the very least one cannot ignore the basic components involved in the communication process, including: source, message, channel, and receiver. For debate, the communication process components could be expressed as: source (debater), message (case arguments), channel (verbal), and receiver (judge/audience). Even in the debate round the basic communication process is taking place. Certainly, persuasion is involved as the judge/critic is "influenced," (Brembeck and

Howell, 1976; Smith, 1982), to accept information and analysis presented by one debate team over that presented by another debate team.

Of course, whether one receives "the win" or "the loss" does not indicate whether or not the communication that occurred in the debate round was actually effective. A discussion of communication effectiveness is not intended in this paper; however, the issue may warrant further discussion at another time.

Benefits

Why should a student debate in the first place? A variety of benefits to forensic participation have been noted over the years. For example, 1) the improvement of the students' skills in communication, 2) the opportunity to study an issue intensely, 3) the development of critical thinking skills, and 4) pre-professional preparation (Colbert and Biggers, 1985; Hill, 1987; Colbert, 1989).

Benefits were strongly suggested by 703 former NDT debate participants from 1947-1980 in the study completed by Matlon and Keele (1984). Interestingly, "since 1947, the main advantage cited has been the attainment of public speaking skills" (196). In addition, the most cited disadvantage in the study, for the most recent group 1969-80, was that the participants "learned to speak too rapidly" (198). As a result, former participants suggested that "program directors should do all they can to teach effective public speaking skills, including careful choice of

quality arguments spoken at a reasonable rate of speed" (Matlon and Keele, 1984, 201).

The information from former debate participants should be taken very seriously, as former participants, they are the best qualified to look back and evaluate the debate activity. Thus, each forensic educator should review his/her program in relation to the development of "effective public speaking skills" for the student.

Other writers, (Rowland, 1984; Ulrich, 1986), note the public speaking focus of CEDA debate. A focus on delivery was certainly inherent in the creation of CEDA (Tomlinson, 1981; Rowland, 1984). Howe (1981) says it most strongly, "the judge should never find it impossible to take notes because of the spate of words erupting from the speaker. The CEDA debater should realize that his primary responsibility is to communicate with everybody in the room: his opponents, his judge, and any audience that may be present" (1). More recently, Hill (1987) adds, that "there seems to be a general consensus that one of the primary objectives of CEDA is to eliminate fast delivery by its debaters" (20).

At this point, one would wonder whether the intent of CEDA is being carried out in terms of delivery. If the intent of CEDA is being carried out; why are so many coaches and judges complaining about fast delivery still occurring in debate? If the intent of CEDA is not being carried out; why isn't something being done more directly to change the activity? It appears that

this particular objective of CEDA needs more emphasis. A clear acceptance, or even rejection, could reduce the confusion for all participants.

Speed

There are some arguments that do rationalize the use of speed in the debate process (Colbert, 1990). Two primary reasons for speed, include: 1) competition, and 2) environment.

First, speed in the debate round may be due to the spirit of competition. Since time limits exist, the debater feels he/she has to talk rapidly to get the arguments and evidence into the round for consideration during the time allowed (Colbert, 1990, 7; Ulrich, 1985, 39). Therefore, speed may be seen as a means of survival by the debaters, i.e., if we don't do it, they will.

Unfortunately, the speed strategy is opposed to the intent of debate - leading to ineffective communication, rather than furthering understanding about the resolution being debated. The result of the new competition in speed only tests a debaters ability to speak rapidly, rather than develop solid, understandable, arguments. Finally, speed does little to foster the benefits of debate already noted. For example, analysis and critical thinking are hardly enhanced by presenting the arguments at a rate only understood by a computer.

Second, speed in debate involves the environment in which debate occurs (Colbert, 1989; Murrish, 1964). A debate tournament is hardly a public experience attracting a variety of

spectators. Few debate rounds attract more than those needing to be present for the round, i.e., two debate teams and a judge.

Yet, the debate process should be encouraging to visitation. Unfortunately, that is not the case currently, as few individuals wish to sit for an hour listening to information that makes little sense to them. Perhaps more public attention would foster rapid changes in student communication behavior, or would sentence the activity to a rapid demise.

Certainly, the rate of delivery becomes important to the debate process. But, what rate is acceptable? Colbert (1990) notes, that "normal public speaking rates range from 150-200 words per minute (wpm). ...275-300 wpm is the range at which comprehension begins to suffer" (7). Weiss (1982) more conservatively argues, that "once the speaking rate approaches 175-200 words per minute, intelligibility begins to deteriorate because precise neuromuscular coordination of the speech structures at such a rapid rate is practically impossible" (23).

Speed may be a strategy in the game of debate, but it does nothing for developing usable communication skills that focus on analysis and persuasion of an audience. One does wonder, why forensic coaches continue to encourage a "skill" that has little, if any, applicability out of debate competition.

Judges

Interestingly, debate judges report that they are concerned about delivery. Norton (1981) surveyed twenty-eight judges at the Great Western Invitational Tournament at the University of

Nevada-Reno. Of those responding to the survey, thirty-six percent indicated that "delivery skills" were part of their judging criteria for judging a CEDA debate (11). Brey (1989) studied the statements of those judging the 1987 and 1988 National CEDA Tournament and found an "almost 2-to-1 margin favoring judges who flatly reject speed, compared to judges who accept speed" (76).

Some "lay judges" have criticized the activity primarily involving speed of delivery (Friedman, 1972; Steinfatt, 1989). The lay judge represents a "normal" public audience, without bias and limited knowledge of the resolution. Debaters should jump at the chance to test their communication skills and knowledge of the topic before these individuals. Unfortunately, the reverse is usually true. Most lay judges are perceived as "idiots," rather than representatives of the public audience.

Even with negative judge reaction to speed in debate, fast delivery still exists. Some research concerning individual perceptions, (Thompson and others, 1981) suggests, that "delivery in CEDA is slower and more conversational than in NDT" (4). Although this comparison may be true, it does not address the issue of how much slower CEDA is compared to NDT.

Perhaps "rejection" of speed by the judge does not mean ballot loss. Judges are faced with a very real peer pressure (Ulrich, 1985), which precludes their punishing debaters who don't communicate. Therefore, fast debaters are continuing to win rounds which cause other debaters to model the same winning

behavior. Logically, the model that wins is most likely to be used by debaters. Thus, the behavior must be changed. A new acceptance level for delivery and communication in the debate round has to be emphasized.

Audience-Centered Model

It seems logical to argue that debate should be intelligible to an audience (Weiss, 1982). As a matter of fact, to be intelligible, it isn't even necessary for the debater to abandon speed altogether. The primary criteria is only that the speed of delivery in the debate "should not supersede articulation, clarity, explanation and structure" (Brey, 1990, 75). One way of determining the acceptable rate of delivery and emphasizing communication would be through an audience-centered model (Tomlinson, 1981; Weiss, 1985).

The audience-centered model allows the judge to "represent" a larger audience, thereby evaluating the ability of the debater(s) to communicate. This model does not eliminate the need for evidence, analysis, arguments and structure; rather, it forces the debater(s) to think about the audience from a "real-world" perspective.

Supposedly, debaters are generally able to adapt to judges and their expectations (Colbert, 1990; Ulrich, 1985). Therefore, the audience-centered model, emphasizing communication, would only require that the judge accept and use it in determining his/her decision. The result of using the audience-centered model may certainly decrease speed and increase communication in

the debate process. The change may even allow for more effective use of the lay judge and attract more spectators to a debate tournament.

Recommendations

First, it is time to clarify the goals of CEDA. A renewed emphasis on the original intent of understandable delivery for CEDA should be stressed. A fine-tuning, at this point, seems preferable to the creation of another new organization.

Second, allow judges to penalize speed without peer pressure. Philosophy differences should be encouraged and openly discussed in positive situations. The use of forums, or simple position papers, should be encouraged throughout the organization in which philosophies can be discussed more openly.

Third, the current use of rapid delivery in debate must be changed to a model involving understandable communication. This may involve the use of the "audience-centered model" for determining delivery acceptance. Basically, if a normal audience couldn't follow the message, don't accept it.

Fourth, forensic directors must accept the responsibility to emphasize public speaking skills that are usable after debate competition is completed. Simply placing a student in various individual speaking events is not the answer.

Conclusion

Debate may provide an opportunity to hone one's communication skills in preparation for a future profession, or it may be simply an exercise, even game, that provides a temporary

challenge for the participant. Both perspectives may be true. Yet, as a forensic educator, there should be a responsibility to teach the student beneficial skills usable after the "game" has ended.

This paper has endeavored to address the issue of communication, specifically delivery, in the debate process. A number of corresponding issues that impact communication, and delivery, in the debate process were discussed. Hopefully the reader will think about the issues presented and even continue the dialogue intended by the four recommendations noted.

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